



Breaking the Mould?: Exhibiting Khoisan in Southern African Museums

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Cohen and Fukui's *Humanising the city* (1993), Hendry's *Wrapping culture* (1993); recently Parker and Gagon's *Conceiving Sexuality* (1995), Stacia E. Zabusy's *Launching Europe: an ethnography of European cooperation in space science* (1995), Gerd Baumann's *Contesting Culture: Discourses of identity in multi-ethnic London* (1996), and now *Popularizing Anthropology* (MacClancy and MacDonaugh, in press).

A gerund or verbal noun is often indistinguishable in English from a present participle, which may be used as an adjective. So it is not only that we and the author are setting out at an *understanding* of the discipline of social anthropology, but social anthropology is also the most *understanding* of disciplines; just as people not only engage in *writing* about (or *wrapping* or *consuming* or *contesting*) culture but also belong to a culture governed by *writing* (etc.). The fact that the gerund is notoriously one of the most tricky bits of English syntax to get right (cf. Fowler, Partridge on good usage) has been turned to effect by these anthropologists, sometimes (as in *Contesting Markets*) to convey vividly

the importance of action and dialectics in their definition of – defining – the discipline.

But this sort of innovation soon becomes a tic, which will one day enable our successors to date the books on their anthropology shelves; just as much as will that other tic, putting all possible nouns in the plural so as to show how pluralistic and multivocal the author is.

The title preferred by the editor, Elizabeth Edwards, for the RAI's *Anthropology and Photography 1860-1920*, published by Yale in 1992, was the much more interesting *Anthropology Re-photographed*, inspired by one of the contributors, Chris Pinney. It was finally rejected on sales grounds. Even when allowed an evocative title, an author has increasingly to face the curse of the keyword: no book can sell unless its contents are summarized in the sub-title, which can be like having to have a joke explained. We have reached the age of Pedestrianizing Titles. □

Jonathan Benthall

Breaking the mould?

Exhibiting Khoisan in Southern African museums

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I would like to thank Pippa Skotnes for inviting me to the preview and opening of the *Miscast* exhibition, and Martin Hall, Anne Solomon and other members of the Department of Archaeology, University of Cape Town, for their hospitality during my stay. My thanks also to the University of Botswana Basarwa Studies Research Fund for financial assistance, and to William Schreck for commenting on an earlier draft.

Historical background

The encounter between Khoisan peoples of Southern Africa and Europeans was on occasion as barbaric as any of the experiences of Native American peoples or Australian Aborigines in similar circumstances. For over three hundred years, Dutch, British, Portuguese and, later, Afrikaaner colonists took Khoisan land for their own purposes, hunted and captured Khoisan for slavery, sport or exhibition, and measured, dissected and gazed upon Khoisan bodies in the names of Medical Science and Anthropology. This relationship was not entirely one-sided, and a number of Khoi and San groups resisted colonial expansion through raids, stock-theft and, more rarely, open rebellion. Whereas the leaders of some of these movements, such as Adam Kok and Simon Kopper, are increasingly regarded as folk heroes by their surviving descendants, history has been curiously silent about such figures. None of the major studies of African resistance movements makes reference to such leaders, and it is only recently that historians have begun the task of documenting their lives and the causes and consequences of their struggles (Hitchcock 1991, Gordon 1992; Haacke 1992).¹

Despite such resistance, by the late nineteenth century, and in the Western Cape over 150 years earlier, most of the Khoisan communities that had inhabited parts of what is now South Africa had either been displaced or decimated, and often both. A massive reduction of cultural diversity followed as a result, along with the extinction of the local Khoe languages. Ultimately, a number of southern San languages, most notably //Xam, but also //Ng, //Kx'au, //Ku //e and !Ga !ǀpe also disappeared (Traill 1996). Whether Khoisan peoples living further north in and on the margins of the Kalahari were less affected by European expansion is a matter of debate, which has generated scores of contrasting interpretations (e.g., Wilmsen 1989, Solway and Lee 1990, Kent 1992, Lee and Guenther 1993,

Dickens 1995). Regardless of the historical realities in these remoter areas, by the early part of the twentieth century there was a widespread perception among colonial officers and ethnographers that the 'Bushmen' were at risk. Reserves were created and legislation enacted with the object of 'protecting' communities that were still regarded by many as being residual representations of the Stone Age, the living link between Man and Beast.²

The image of the 'noble bushman', so familiar from introductory texts on anthropology, remains a powerful one, which some have argued lies at the root of the continuing disenfranchisement and social, economic and cultural marginalization of Khoisan peoples in the post-independence era of Southern Africa (Schrire 1984, Wilmsen 1996). It is certainly the case that, compared with Native American, Australian Aboriginal, Maori and similar autochthonous³ peoples, the Khoisan groups of Southern Africa have had only limited success at winning rights to their land, or in their struggles against mining companies, cattle ranchers and the tourism industry. Moreover, there are few signs of a change in the manner of their representation in Western popular culture. Films such as *The Gods must be Crazy* and its various spin-offs and imitators⁴ in which 'Bushman' stereotypes are reproduced continue to be made and attract sizeable audiences. The tourism industry, in particular, relies heavily on these images, and various ventures are in place throughout the region where visitors can meet with 'real' or 'pure Bushmen' (and women) (Buntman 1996). Equally, there is a growing use of Bushman imagery in the regional advertising industry, and in the manufacture and sale of all types of 'Bushman' souvenirs and trinketry such as coffee-mugs, place-mats, fridge magnets and so forth (Dowson 1996). Even the official emblem of the South African National Olympic Committee for the 1996 Games

incorporated a motif adapted from a San rock art site in the Drakensberg (Ouzman 1995).

The source of this imagery may lie in part in the anthropological literature and popular works such as those by Laurens van der Post. However, national and regional museums, as the public face of the discipline, have also served to perpetuate among lay audiences a perception of Khoisan as timeless hunter-gatherers. As Mazel and Ritchie (1994) have observed, static ethnic displays of 'Bushmen' are the main media for presenting Khoisan history and culture to the museum public throughout the region (and not just in South Africa). Frequently, these displays are constructed around one or more dioramas depicting San men and women in hunting and gathering mode. Attempts to link San culture and history to Later Stone Age archaeological material are rare, and generally only by association. Given the lack of related displays on human evolution, or, for that matter, any non-stereotypical representations, the displays consequently reinforce public impressions of Khoisan as being without history. Since many of these displays are housed in Natural History Museums, and thus are spatially separated from exhibits on the history of immigrant European or Asian groups⁵, the dominant strategies of display not only suggest a 'lack' of history, but also a physical 'absence' from it.

Although museologists within the region have become increasingly aware of these problems, attempts to remedy them have not been entirely successful. For instance, the South African Museum in Cape Town recently mounted a small exhibition to accompany a series of dioramas that ostensibly document the life of the Cape Bushmen from the Late Stone Age to about 1800 AD. The dioramas have been a feature of the South African Museum ethnographic gallery since the 1940s, and contain a series of technically accomplished body casts of Cape Bushmen, made by James Drury between 1907 and 1924 (Davison 1993). Placed in seemingly realistic environmental settings, these dioramas have been one of the most popular exhibits in the Museum. However, in keeping with the social and political contexts at the time of their creation, the dioramas also 'represented the stereotypical appearance of the Bushman, short in stature, pale, yellow skinned, men slight, women with large buttocks, sparsely covered with dull skin apparel' (Skotnes 1995:15). In an effort to redress this imagery, in the late 1980s the Museum added a small exhibition about the casting project, which provides some explanation of the socio-political context behind the dioramas, as well as documenting something of the personal histories of the individuals whose bodies were cast (Davison 1990:163).

However, many visitors continue to be drawn to the dioramas and may only glance briefly at the new exhibit which attempts to deconstruct the stereotypes presented in the dioramas. Tour guides, also, continue to focus on the physical characteristics of 'Bushmen' (Skotnes 1995:14), as well as emphasizing their knowledge of the natural environment and alleged abilities to go without water for extended periods of time⁶. On occasion, these guides have even been heard to identify the figures in the earlier dioramas as 'wild bushmen', contrasting them with that of 'a domesticated bushman' (i.e. Khoi pastoralist) which features in another diorama elsewhere in the ethnographic galleries (Anne Solomon, pers. comm.).

Similar stereotypes and prejudices have also determined the way in which Southern African rock art (most of which is believed to be of San authorship), has been displayed and interpreted for the public. Thus, for

instance, until recently the largest collection of Southern African rock-engravings were exhibited in an area of the Johannesburg Zoological Gardens. As Dowson and Lewis-Williams observe, while the accompanying interpretation served to reduce the meanings of this art to a simple story of almost childlike scribbles, the location of the exhibit at the zoo implicitly encouraged 'visitors to check the artists' accuracy against real animals' (1993:48). Thus, not only did this establish a criterion by which the art could be judged, it also imposed a system of Western value judgements on the nature and meaning of art as a generality. This may well account for why, until recently, South African art galleries have ignored the regional rock art. That is to day, because the art was perceived as the product of a 'primitive race', yet judged against Western artistic criteria, it was rarely considered by the galleries to meet standards of technique and form.

The engravings have since been relocated to form part of a 'permanent' exhibition on San rock art at the MuseumAfrica, Johannesburg. Although in this context the engravings and other South African rock art have been more imaginatively displayed, and presented in the light of more recent thinking on the shamanistic origins of this art, the exhibition has not been entirely successful. Thus, for instance, Solomon has criticized the exhibition for adopting a too dogmatic position regarding the meaning of the art, and for placing too much emphasis on the art from the Drakensberg area (1995). As she observes, both strategies succeed in suppressing difference, whether in regional styles and contexts of production or in archaeological interpretations of the art. The 'viewer is [thus] given no reason to doubt that s/he is being presented with anything but incontrovertible, authoritative facts' (1995:138). Skotnes' criticisms, on the other hand, focus on the dearth of interpretative labelling and guidance for some of the exhibits. In particular, she notes that it is only the copies included in the displays which have been labelled and interpreted. The examples of actual engravings and paintings, on the other hand, are allowed to stand in isolation, unlabelled apart from a single sign which declares that they are exhibited for the visitor to enjoy 'just as art' (1995:19). Thus, far from breaking new ground, the exhibition appears to have reproduced in its approach the kind of ahistorical essentialism that it sought to overturn.

The few attempts by South African art galleries to exhibit San rock art have been equally problematic, although the cultural stereotypes have tended to be reproduced in different ways than has been the case with museums. For example, Dowson and Lewis-Williams question the approaches used in a recent display at the William Humphreys Art Gallery, Kimberley, which juxtaposed a number of rock engravings with etchings and acrylics by contemporary artists inspired by the rock art. In particular, they are critical of the policy which allowed visitors, on payment of a small fee, to make their own rubbings of the engravings, since it established an uneven relationship between the engravings and 'the Western *objets d'art* in other sections of the gallery ... protected by "Do not touch" notices' (1993:51). This, they argue, would imply to visitors to the Gallery that the engravings were not as valuable in either aesthetic or monetary terms as the objects of Western art on display.

The reasons for the neglect of Southern African rock art by art galleries, however, may be both more mundane and more complex than Dowson and Lewis-Williams suggest. In the first place, other than as a copy,

ACTAG. 1995. *A New Policy for the Transformation of South African Museums and Museum Services*. Pretoria: Arts and Culture Task Group (Heritage) - Final Report.

Buntman, Barbra. 1996. 'Bushman images in South African tourist advertising: the case of Kaggga Khama.' In *Miscast. Negotiating the Presence of the Bushmen*, Skotnes, P. (ed.), Cape Town: UCT Press, pp.271-279.

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—1993. Human subjects as museum objects. A project to make life-casts of

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- Hitchcock, Robert. 1991. Kuacaca: an early case of ethnoarchaeology in most of the rock art simply cannot be exhibited within a gallery, given the nature of the 'canvas' on which it is exhibited and the legal protection afforded to it by various Antiquities and Ancient Monuments Acts. Such practicalities aside, other factors also require consideration. For instance, it is possible that the absence of San art from South African art galleries is the result of a more widespread neglect of works by black artists in general. As Rankin has observed, until recently *all* objects of African origin were treated as ethnographica including 'those that could be defined as art in western terms' (1995:62), and were exhibited as such in either Natural History or Ethnology Museums. As illustration of this practice, Rankin cites the treatment given to a series of clay figures made in the 1930s by the sculptor Samuel Makoanyane. Despite being readily identifiable as 'contemporary art', the National Cultural History Museum in Pretoria classified Makoanyane's figures as simply 'Southern Sotho'. In so doing, works of art by an individual artist came to be represented as archetypal of a particular linguistic group (ibid.).
- Whereas some black artists have received more sympathetic consideration in recent years, to a large extent this has been because of a highly politicized reading of their work. By contrast, art which does not have such obvious contemporary referents, such as the regional rock art, as discussed above, has continued to be regarded merely as an ethnographic or historical curiosity requiring little in the way of interpretative exegesis.

Miscast: negotiating Khoisan history and material culture

It is precisely these images of Khoisan communities, and the history of European interactions with them, that the exhibition *Miscast: Negotiating Khoisan History and Material Culture*, which opened last April at the South African National Gallery (SANG) in Cape Town, aims to confront. In the words of the exhibition's curator, Pippa Skotnes, strictly speaking, it is not about 'Bushmen'. It is, instead 'a critical and visual exploration of the term "Bushman" and the various relationships that gave rise to it' (1996: 18)⁷. The exhibition may tell us more, therefore, about European colonists and researchers than about 'Bushmen'. But, in so doing, the observer is forced to reconsider her or his own understanding of the term 'Bushman', in the light of the legacy of selective representation that is revealed by the exhibition.

Skotnes, who is a lecturer in the Michaelis School of Fine Art, University of Cape Town, is also an artist of some repute in Southern Africa. Her previous exhibition on Khoisan material culture and history, *Sound from the Thinking Strings*⁸, broke new ground in exhibition practice in South Africa by juxtaposing archaeological, ethnographic and archival San materials with her own interpretations of San oral history expressed through a series of etchings and poems. Writing about this exhibition, Skotnes has argued that it was explicitly designed in Karp and Levine's terms as artwork, with a primary focus being the visual experience (Skotnes and Payne, 1995:91). The choice of a museum, as opposed to an art gallery⁹, as the venue for the *Sound from the Thinking Strings* exhibition was equally deliberate, since it was considered that the adjacent ethnographic halls would provide a powerful contextualizing contrast for the exhibited material, and so encourage reappraisal of the conventional boundaries between the categories 'art' and 'museum object' (ib.).

Although these biographical details are absent from the *Miscast* exhibition, they underpin many of its as-

pects including the choice of venue, the selection of imagery and their manner of display and juxtaposition. For Skotnes, the inclusion of objects from diverse sources, texts and artworks along with the 'transparently subjective presence of the curator', are all critical components of the new model of 'contemporary post-colonial museum practice' that is needed in the 'New South Africa' (op. cit.:92-3). As with any exhibition, there are thus a number of layers of meaning to *Miscast* that relate only in part to the objects and images exhibited and the contexts of their production. The manner of exhibition, the choice of institutional framework, the strategies and objectives of the curator, the multiple histories and perspectives of different audiences and the contemporary socio-political setting also all inform and contribute to the totality of the exhibition experience.

No single reading will, therefore, capture the diversity of meanings or the various referents of the exhibited material. Interpretations will differ from curator and audience and between different audiences. Despite this, it is still possible to peel away some of the layers of meaning and so unearth, not necessarily truth, but, at the very least, a hidden history, a stratigraphy of knowledge claims and the accumulated debris of their production. This use of archaeological metaphors here is deliberate. It is in part in recognition of Foucault's observation that all knowledge has its archaeology (1972), and, as such, *Miscast* endeavours to expose that concerning European claims to 'know the Bushman'. It is also in recognition of the complicity of archaeology in the transformation of Khoisan from human subjects to museum objects. While this is most evident from the discipline's conventional approach to the treatment of human remains, the more general obsession with documentation, display and storage of other people's history has been equally instrumental in fostering this type of relationship.

However, most importantly, this use of archaeological metaphors also stems from the very format of the exhibition. For, whether consciously or not, Skotnes has employed a range of familiar archaeological imagery in novel ways which, as an archaeologist, I found extremely disconcerting. In essence, what I experienced by viewing the exhibition was the recontextualization of my own professional 'culture', and all the mixed emotions of pain, disbelief and denial that can accompany an encounter with another's view of one's identity. Yet, there are no pictures of archaeologists at work in this exhibition, no dioramas of trenches during excavation or similar fieldwork scenes which provide the usual means for displaying 'Archaeology'. The allusions to archaeology as a discipline are far more implicit, and, as a result, far more subversive. To understand these it is necessary to know a little more about the design of the exhibition and the types of images displayed.

Exhibition space

The exhibition is accommodated in three interconnecting rooms. Each has its own focus, dominant form of imagery, and function within the corpus as a whole. Owing to the constraints imposed by the SANG building and available exhibition space, two of the rooms can be approached from different directions. This can have the effect of lessening the exhibition's impact, for, although the displays in each room have their own integrity, the content of each suggest that they are supposed to be viewed in a particular sequence. This impression is further reinforced by the design of the main exhibition hall, which was clearly intended to be approached

Plate 1: The story behind the 'Bushman' casts in the South African Museum, Cape Town.



Plate 2: Offensive reminders of a painful past, or art works? Wax moulds for making body casts, on display at the Miscast exhibition, Cape Town.

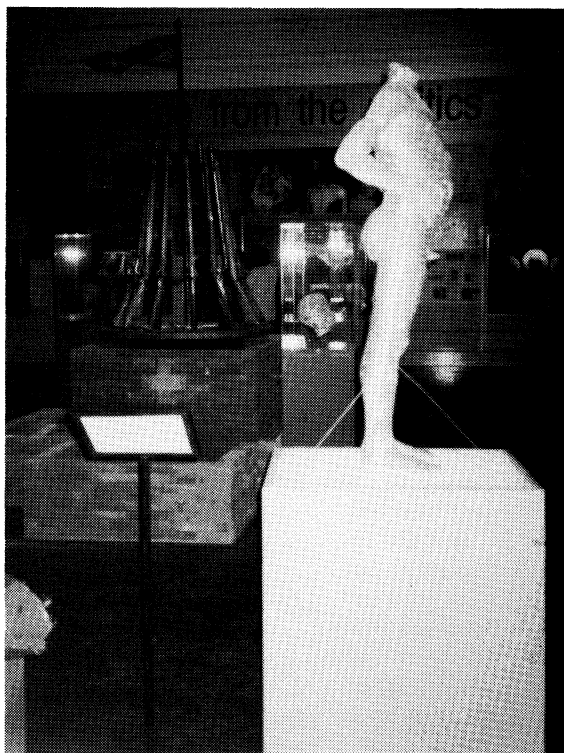


Plate 3: A fragmented past, boxed, labelled and appropriated by Science.



through the pair of imposing double doors that lead off the Gallery's central atrium.

Entering through these doors, one is confronted by a centrepiece of neatly stacked rifles, chained together, guarded at each corner by a solitary, severed head. Between the centrepiece and the doors lie a series of pedestals, arranged in a broad arc. On these, are mounted a miscellaneous collection of moulded human torsos, disembodied legs and genitalia, looking for all the world like some macabre and slightly pornographic Greek statuary. Towering above these images is a text, printed in blood-red letters half a metre high along the length of the back wall proclaiming: *There is no escape from the politics of knowledge.*

The heads are casts of trophies taken from slain Khoisan in the nineteenth century, which are still held in museum collections in Britain and Germany. One seemed strangely familiar, although it was not until I came across a photograph of the same head, complete with details of its history and current provenance, that I realized why. This head is held by the Duckworth Laboratory, in the Department of Biological Anthropology at Cambridge University, and I remember it from my undergraduate days. Although no longer on such public display, at the time it stood on top of a filing cabinet in the room used for student practicals, as a silent on-looker to our inexperienced grapplings with the intricacies of human and primate anatomy.

Imposing glass exhibition cases filled with gleaming steel instruments of measurement and dissection and the related paraphernalia of the craniologist stand on either side of the main doorway. These are flanked in turn by double racks of Dexian shelving, weighted down by layer upon layer of classic archival storage boxes. Each is neatly labelled; a step-ladder stands between two of the racks. From a distance the labels resemble museum accession cards. On closer inspection, some simply declare '*Human Remains. Not Suitable for Display*'. Others carry fragments of the history of colonial settlement in South Africa and of European-Khoisan interactions. '*1739 [1993] All male burgers in the frontier districts are obliged to serve in commandoes. It is hoped this will curb Bushmen stock theft*', reads one. Another records '*1922 [1996] Koos Sas is shot while*

- the Northern Kalahari. *Botswana Notes & Records* 23: 223-233
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- resisting arrest. His skull is sent to the Physiology Department, University of Stellenbosch, and postcard images of the dead Koos Sas are sold in aid of the Afrikaans Christian Women's Organisation'.*
- For an archaeologist, the image of neatly stacked boxes is a familiar one, immediately reminiscent of the countless museum stores inspected and the awareness of the human remains that are lodged in them passively awaiting the attentions of researcher and curator alike. By recontextualizing museum storage practices as part of a gallery exhibition, Skotnes encourages us to think again about our motives for collecting and to consider whether the museum as institution is no more than a collective cultural mausoleum. Yet, on another level, the specific technicalities of the display also challenge and subvert the anonymity to which such human remains are normally assigned, and the rationale for keeping and examining them. In place of site codes and catalogue numbers, the 'labels' provide glimpses of real people whose lives and deaths became part of a collective history. Thus the need to acknowledge that history, how it has been written and how it could be written differently is immediately foregrounded.
- More boxes are stacked on the floor beside the racks, and, next to these on either side of the room are low piles of dismembered body parts. Arms, legs, headless torsos lie jumbled together as if just discarded after an episode of mass butchery. Of course, the body parts are not real, but merely hollow moulds once used for making the 'Bushman' casts that now stand in museum dioramas. Their proximity to the cases of dissection tools, however, evokes a sense of more brutal treatment and one immediately imagines that the racked boxes contain their missing bones. So placed, the moulds no longer remain mute, museological curios, but come to be seen instead as both the literal and metaphorical remains of desiccated Khoisan bodies, filleted and defleshed to provide the 'meat' of Western science. Thus archaeologists, medical scientists, physical and cultural anthropologists become the new hunter-gatherers, obsessed with the anatomy and biological identity of their prey.
- The rear section of the main exhibition hall is taken up by a display of enlarged, monochrome photographs taken between 1852 and 1952, of Khoisan and their European observers. Archival and more recent photographs of anthropologists and others who have worked among Khoisan are juxtaposed with those of nineteenth and early twentieth century Khoisan communities. The images are mixed; some are studio portraits, others were clearly taken in the field. One of the former, which depicts the nineteenth century impresario Farini¹¹ in Victorian dress standing over a group of his 'Earth People' clad only in skins and leather loin cloths, perfectly captures the imbalances in power between Europeans and Khoisan. With the exception of the photographs of //Kabbo and Dia!kwain who worked as informants for the linguists-cum-anthropologists Wilhelm Bleek and Lucy Lloyd during the 1870s, and a few others, the names of the Khoisan depicted in these photographs were never recorded. As the accompanying caption notes, most of them 'lived their last years – some their whole lives – in a state of dispossession, poverty, hunger or subject to the cruelty of strangers', rarely able to tell their version of events.
- Photographs, in this case of very recent origin, also form the focus of the adjacent exhibition hall. Taken by the professional photographer Paul Weinberg over several years from 1984 onwards, these tell a rather different story of the San communities in Botswana, Namibia and South Africa. Entitled *Footprints in the Sand*, Weinberg's photographic essay neither degrades nor romanticizes the San. The images are essentially quotidian; images of men and women going about routine tasks of subsistence, socializing, playing music, letting their hair down, posing for television and film crews, laughing, dancing. What strikes one is the absence of the familiar stereotypes. This is a view of the 'other' Bushman – the herder, farm labourer, demobbed South African Defence Force tracker, tourist worker and film star¹² of the type called for by Skotnes (1995:21). Even when men are shown hunting and women and children gathering, they are without the standard props of beads and leather loin cloths. It is the moment and the person that are represented, not the pose.
- Moving from frame to frame, one is at first unaware of other images covering the floor. Closer inspection reveals printed reproductions of colonial documents, photographs and scholarly papers on genitalia and other academically-defined 'unusual' characteristics of Khoisan anatomy, stretching from wall to wall. As realization of the content of the texts and images that were literally underfoot dawned, I became increasingly uncomfortable. My movement around the room became constrained, yet there was no way of skirting around this material, no way of avoiding treading on it. Actual, physical involvement with the substance of the exhibition became inevitable. Perhaps it was because of this, that of all the shocking elements to the exhibition, I found this one to be the most disturbing. Others were also moved by it or complained about it, as we shall see.
- Not everyone will react in this way, and some of those who attended the preview and opening were almost oblivious to the material underfoot. Reflecting on the experience, however, I was struck once again by an archaeological parallel and forced to reconsider my own practice. Just as the texts and images on the floor represent the debris of a particular history, so too do the artefacts strewn across the surface of a site. Yet archaeologists, in trying to define sites and their history, feel they can tread on the debris of their own or others' ancestors with equanimity, colonizing that space for themselves.
- In the last room of the exhibition, there was yet another reminder of the similarities between sites and exhibitions. Most of this room is devoted to dual audio-visual facilities, each running a continuous loop of 16mm. archival footage of San communities. The overlapping sounds of songs and narrative provide a constant, and slightly plaintive, aural backdrop to the entire exhibition. After so much exposure to the pictorial, textual and artefactual 'voices' of the observers, the two screens offer an opportunity to listen to the voices of the San. On a nearby table, A3-sized ring-binders containing copies of archival documents have been set out for visitors to browse through. On the other side of the room is an old-style display case, containing drawings by George Stone, a notebook of Lucy Lloyd's open at one of her entries, and books of drawings and watercolours by Tamme and !Nanni, two of Lloyd's !Kung informants who worked with her in the late 19th century.
- Painted, coloured reproductions of some of the regional rock art hang on the surrounding walls. Amidst them is a single contemporary original painting by Qwaa, a Naro artist based at the Kuru Development Trust in Botswana, of a pink, grey and white eland against a vivid blue background. Accompanying this is a text, explaining the history of the Naro land, the significance of the eland and the work of the Trust, which begins 'The land is all gone now ...'.



Left: Plate 4: Visitors examine the gruesome details underfoot at the Miscast exhibition, Cape Town.

Right: Plate 5: The inverted temporal sequence of these different episodes of artistic production helps to re-establish the primacy of San rock art.



All of these elements conspire to remind the visitor of a Khoisan presence, and of their collective and individual artistic achievements. There is a very noticeable absence of 'the European' here, and a conscious effort seems to have been made to erase the sedimented layers of successive European representations of Khoisan culture and society. As if to epitomize this wished-for transformation of power relations, page-proofs of Skotnes' edited book which accompanies the exhibition, have been pinned to the partitions that screen the audio-visual area. The page-proofs are overlain by eighteenth and nineteenth century photographs and prints, which in turn are overlain by ink tracings of San rock art. A reverse stratigraphy of images is thus created, the very latest at the bottom, the earliest at the top. Not only does this emphasize the primacy of the original images, it also serves to reassert the authority of Khoisan to represent and to inscribe their landscapes with meaning. An analogy can thus be drawn between the original rock art sites and contemporary museums. Both are, or were, places for remembering and forgetting; arenas where certain images were selected and arranged for display and others excluded in the process of creating meanings. The position of this particular combination of overlapping images also adds to this analogy. Their location at the threshold of the innermost space of the exhibition creates an impression that one has reached a symbolic shelter, ritually protected by a sequence of paintings. Crossing the threshold is as if one is entering another world; a world where Khoisan voices can be heard once more, beginning the painful task of telling their story as they saw it and on their terms.

Conclusion

Western representations of Khoisan have been mixed, often alternating between attitudes of prurient censure and lascivious desire. At times, this imagery has even managed to capture both these sentiments. Such ambivalence towards the ontological status of the non-western 'other' appears to have been a common characteristic of nineteenth and early twentieth century European thought, and is evident in representations of all manner of non-western peoples produced during this era, and not just those of Khoisan. Equally, in all cases scholarly discourse about these particular 'others' has tended to occupy a recursive position relative to the relevant representational imagery, being both driven by it and a contributor to it. However, what marks the representation of Khoi, and more especially San, as distinctive, at least in so far as the African continent is concerned, is that as a category of non-western 'other' these communities have acquired an iconic status in Western culture not shared by other African peoples. For, as Gamble (1992) has observed, by virtue of practising a foraging mode of subsistence at the time of their encounter with European cultures, and occupying a geographical situation at one of 'the uttermost ends of the earth', San came to be regarded as either the archetypal Primitive or Noble Savage.

The virtual absence of such archetypes from Skotnes' *Miscast* exhibition is, thus, a welcome development. Even where present, as in the texts of some of the colonial documents on display, their contextualization is sufficiently ironic to leave little room for misunderstanding by an informed Western audience. However, it is precisely this emphasis on irony as the major tropic device of the exhibition which, seen in broader

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- perspective, makes the entire exhibition somewhat problematic. This is for at least two, related, reasons. The first of these concerns the difficulties non-western audiences may have in appreciating the ironic intent behind the utilization of particular types of imagery. The second stems from this more literal reading of the exhibition, in that the lack of images of Khoisan in positions of empowerment could give rise to a new archetype, that of victim.
- Signs that the first of these might be so were evident at the exhibition opening, and on the following day at a specially convened gathering of Khoisan representatives from around the region hosted by SANG. In terms of the opening, the most noticeable aspect was the absence of any official representation from the new Government of National Unity, the ANC, or any of the other 'black' political parties. This may have been an administrative oversight, or a deliberate policy on the part of SANG not to politicize the event. However, given the overt political messages of the exhibition and the current preoccupation in South Africa with restoring a 'past' or 'pasts' to the black majority (e.g. Gawe and Meli 1990), and redefining the relevance of history, archaeology, and museums to contemporary South African society (e.g. Davison 1990, M. Hall 1994, Martin 1994, Spiegel 1994, ACTAG 1995, J. Hall 1995, Metz 1995), this seems hardly credible. A more probable explanation may lie in a perception, among the majority of black South Africans, of museums as being largely irrelevant to their lives.
- The immediate reactions to the exhibition of some of the Khoisan representatives, given during and after the discussion forum, provide more concrete evidence for differences in the interpretative perspectives of western and non-western audiences. For example, Hunter Sixpence, the Public Relations Officer for the Kuru Development Trust (KDT) at D'Kar near Ghanzi in northern Botswana, commented that it was against San culture 'to see nudity together as mother, father and child', and that the exhibition had left the KDT delegates with 'painful hearts'. Selinah Magu, also from KDT, expressed similar sentiments when she said that 'Showing these naked bodies is a very bad, bad thing'. Equally problematic, from her perspective, was the display of graphic photographs on the floor in the two subsidiary exhibition halls. 'I was walking on my own people', she said, 'their suffering is too important to have been shown on the floor ... This is a big insult on [sic] us; will this be how our children will remember us?'
- In his prepared speech delivered at the forum, Mansell Upham, the 'mandated legal representative of the Griqua National Conference', was even more outspoken, declaring the exhibition to be a 'tokenist afterthought and patronising'. The exhibition was also criticized for failing to explore the systematic dispossession of the Griqua from their land, and the South African Government's alleged continuing neglect of Griqua demands for recognition of their indigenous status, the return of their lands, and compensation. A typed statement issued by another Griqua organization a few days after the opening reiterated many of these same views, beginning as follows:
- We are sick and tired of naked Brown people being exposed to the curious glances of rich whites in search of dinner table conversation (!Hurikamma Cultural Movement, 1996).
- Commenting on the exhibition, the statement concludes that since the objectives were primarily concerned with European 'manipulations of the image of the Khoisan', the exhibition was 'obviously aimed at white people'. Khoisan, on the other hand, so the statement contends,
- do not need to be reminded of the humiliations they have suffered, as they feel these 'daily and hourly'. For this Khoisan group, the *Miscast* exhibition simply reaffirmed their 'status as a conquered people'; in other words, as archetypal victims.
- To some extent, these reactions parallel those expressed by African organizations to the *Into the Heart of Africa* exhibition mounted by the Royal Ontario Museum in 1990. Although ostensibly concerned with exposing the role played by Canadian evangelists and soldiers in the colonization of Africa, and how this involvement had shaped museum collections of African material culture, the exhibition was boycotted by certain African (and also missionary) groups and its curator accused of racism (Cruikshank 1992). As Linda Hutcheon has observed, the use of irony in this case was problematic partly because its interpretation requires a level of shared knowledge which members of different discursive communities generally lack. As a result, comprehension of an exhibit tends to be individualized by different audiences (1994:220). A further difficulty was that the exhibition's reliance on irony 'was read by some as belonging to a white culture's model of discourse, and its use (and alleged incomprehension) seen as a replication of the missionaries' attitudes' (op. cit.). Without an answering African voice, labels that were intended to be ironic were perceived by some visitors in a more literal, or possibly synecdochical, light.
- Even without the complicating issues of cultural difference, this should come as no surprise. For it is only recently that museums have begun to address such issues as the ownership of cultural property, and control over cultural representation through the medium of exhibitions. As a result, most occasional museum visitors (who possibly make up the majority) have little familiarity with the genre, and are more likely to have been attracted by the possibilities to learn, than by a desire to discover what to distrust (Durrans 1992:12).
- This was certainly a common sentiment among the various Khoisan representatives who spoke at the discussion forum, whose overriding concerns were with the restitution of their land and the right of self-determination. Neither of these contemporary issues are directly addressed in the *Miscast* exhibition, which may account for why some groups were less than fulsome in their praise. However, the harrowing nature of the exhibition's central message, and the very fact that it brought together for the first time representatives from eleven different Khoisan groups, cannot be ignored. Whereas the latter did not result in any form of unified resolutions or plan of action, there was a general sense of heightened solidarity between the different groups after the meeting. As such, *Miscast* may become, in the words of Martin Engelbrecht of the Khoisan Representative Council, 'the beginning of the Khoisan wake-up call'. If it does, then the exhibition will have served its purpose. □
1. The studies by Marks (1972) and Wright (1971), are important exceptions to this observation.
 2. For a synopsis of these attitudes and how they affected the Khoisan populations of the Bechuanaland Protectorate (now Botswana) see Hermans (1977).
 3. Although the term 'Indigenous Peoples' is more commonly used, this is a far more contentious and controversial concept in the Southern African context where an amalgam of different African peoples (and not just Khoisan) have lived in juxtaposition for at least two thousand years; where differences in language, skin colour, physical appearance and economic practices have all provided the basis for discrimination; and where settlers of European descent until very recently perpetrated myths of 'an empty land' (Marks 1980) to legitimate their own claims. For a discussion of how these terminological issues affect Botswana's Khoisan populations, see Saugestad (1993)

Presence of the Bushmen, Skotnes, P. (ed.), Cape Town: UCT Press, pp.185-189.
Wright, John. 1971.
Bushman Raiders of the Drakensberg 1840-1870. Pietermaritzburg: U. of Natal P.

4. The former include *The Gods Must Be Crazy II*, *Crazy Safari* and *Crazy Hong Kong*; among the latter are *Kalahari Harry*, *There's a Bushman on my Stoop* and the Walt Disney film *Desert Adventure*. For a perceptive review of Jamie Uys' first two films, and the reactions of anthropologists to them, see Tomaselli (1992).

5. Also exhibitions concerning the history and/or culture of other African communities. However, these can be found equally in Natural History Museums (e.g. the Zimbabwe Natural History Museum, Bulawayo).

6. Personal observation – South Africa Museum, 12 April 1996; also Royden Yates and Anne Solomon, personal communications, Cape Town, April 1996.

7. Both the exhibition text, and SANG's newsletter for April-June 1996 (SANG 1996:3) also make it clear to the visitor that this is the central theme of the exhibition.

8. Held at the South Africa Museum, Cape Town in 1991.

9. The deliberate nature of this decision would also have been reinforced by the physical locations of the South Africa Museum and the South African National Gallery, since the two institutions are situated just a short distance from one another, within the Gardens area of central Cape Town.

10. Curators, in Skotnes' view, should include contemporary artists as well as museologists.

11. For a brief biographical sketch of Farini, whose real name was William Hunt, the likely identity of his 'Earth People', and the history of other San taken to Europe and the USA for exhibition, see Parsons (1989). Morris (1987) provides some additional details, as well as information about the fate of various San skeletal and human tissue remains.

12. G/aqo/hana, who appeared in *The Gods Must Be Crazy*, photographed wearing a 'Vote Swapo' T-shirt with his family.

Reconstructing Malay identity

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For some time now Malay politicians have been trying to reconstruct Malay identity, a task which they regard as essential if their fellow Malays are to be galvanized into a more active and committed participation within the Malaysian economy. It was this kind of thinking which, for example, could be discerned in a recent speech of the Prime Minister Dr Mahathir Mohamad to an academic audience in Wellington in New Zealand. There he laboured the point that during the colonial period the British had tried to foist on to the Malay population a sense of identity which would prove consonant with the purposes of colonial rule, but which had in fact retarded the economic and social development of the Malays.

This particular interpretation of the consequences of British rule for the evolution of Malaysian society has been more or less endorsed by scholars and in fact derives from their own analysis of colonial policy in Malaya. The argument runs that from the first decade or so of the twentieth century the British decided that the best way to administer Malaya was through the establishment of what later became known – after the term coined by J S Furnivall (1948) – as a plural society in which the different ethnic groups which composed that society, in this case the Malays, the Chinese, the Indians and the British, would each play a separate but complementary role within the economy. The British would perform the role of government assisted by the Malay aristocratic elite, the Malay commoners would be peasant farmers confined to rural areas, the Chinese would oil the wheels of the economy by controlling the market place and the Indians would run many of the essential services besides working in the plantations from which British investors would derive handsome profits. For such a system to operate successfully each ethnic group would have to be both content with the role assigned to it, and convinced that their location within a particular niche in the political economy was the natural outcome of their own particular cultural characteristics and traditions. In short an appropriate ideology had to be manufactured which would satisfy each group. This was the task upon which British scholars and administrators embarked creating as they did along the way the usual stereotypes and myths – e.g. the infamous 'myth of the lazy native' (Alatas

1977) – which were to become almost self-fulfilling prophecies, labels to which behaviour was expected to conform.

The labels which were attached to the Malays referred to 'nature's gentlemen' and spoke of them as farmers and fishermen, essentially rural people, content with the simple pleasures of life and unfitted for competitive struggle in a modern world. As people they were perceived to be cheerful, modest, unassuming, friendly, hospitable, fond of sports and, above all, deferential. (For a good illustration of this view see Swettenham 1906). Since this, in the eyes of the British, is how the Malays were – the wish being father to the perception – it was necessary for the colonial government to protect these innocent Malays and ensure they did not fall victim to the rapaciousness of others. Consequently, in their best interests they were to be tied to the soil; land which they possessed was to be inalienable and additional special reserve land was to be allocated to them.

The combination of both the policy of economic complementarity and the constant repetition of what were held to constitute the quintessential characteristics of the Malay personality meant that when Independence was obtained in 1958, the Malays had been educated – indoctrinated almost – into holding certain assumptions about themselves and their place in the new state, namely: that the civil service and agriculture were the professional domains to which they were most suited; that the land was theirs by birthright as it were – justifying the appellation of themselves as *bumiputera* (sons of the land); that commerce was a sordid occupation best left to others; that the ruling Malay party, UMNO, would continue to protect them and provide patronage and paternalism when necessary; and that they should continue to be deferential to representatives of the former colonial power as they had been in the past.

All these assumptions were anathema to Dr Mahathir, who in a controversial book entitled *The Malay Dilemma* (1970) criticized both the mentality of dependency and the Malay leadership of the time who pandered to it. As a consequence the book was banned in Malaysia and Mahathir was compelled to spend some time in the political wilderness, but in the mid-70's the justice of much of what he had to say – not